

CIA Estimates of Communist Forces  
and Infiltration in Indochina  
(Revised), 16 Nov 70

25X1 18 Nov 70

[redacted] to Carver memo re Rewrite of Order of  
Battle Memorandum for Secretary of Defense Laird  
of 27 October 1970

Attachment: Typescript IM, CIA Estimates of Communist  
Forces and Infiltration in Indochina  
16 Nov 70

ARMY and DIA review(s) completed.

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18 November 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: George Carver

THROUGH : Chief, Indochina Division ✓  
: Deputy Director, Office of Economic  
Research

SUBJECT : Rewrite of Order of Battle Memorandum  
for Secretary of Defense, Laird of 27  
October 1970

Attached is the reworked subject memorandum. A number of editorial and update changes have been made. The major change reflecting our discussion on probable erosion of the combat forces during 1970 appears in paragraph 3 through 6. These replace the part of paragraph 2 that appears in the original on page 2.

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Chief, South Vietnam Branch

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TRANSMITTAL SLIP		DATE
TO: <i>Chief D/I</i>		
ROOM NO.	BUILDING	
REMARKS:		
<p>Since you don't have this      we picked up an      error. Our erosion for      69 was 30,000 <del>sq ft</del> 10,000.      Incidentally, this path      we close to MHC for      69. their erosion was      28,000.</p>		
25X1		
FROM: <span style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 200px; height: 20px; vertical-align: middle;"></span>		
ROOM NO.	BUILDING	EXTENSION

FORM NO. 241  
1 FEB 55REPLACES FORM 36-8  
WHICH MAY BE USED.

(47)

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
16 November 1970

## INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

CIA Estimates of Communist Forces and  
Infiltration in Indochina

Communist Force Levels

A. South Vietnam

1. VC/NVA Regular Combat Forces: The strength of the enemy's regular combat forces at the end of 1967 is estimated to have totaled between 165,000 and 185,000 men. (See Table 1) Enemy forces underwent rapid and substantial augmentation during the weeks just prior to the 1968 Tet Offensive. We estimate that the combat forces reached a peak strength of about 195,000-215,000 toward the end of January 1968. Although the enemy suffered heavy casualties during 1968, particularly in the February, May and August offensives, high levels of infiltration, recruitment and upgrading enabled the Communists to maintain the aggregate strength of their regular combat forces at approximately their December 1967 level. By December 1968, these forces numbered an estimated 170,000 to 190,000 men. The December 1968 estimate and all subsequent estimates have been revised to reflect the increases in strength indicated by the new intelligence gathered by Allied Forces in Cambodia in mid-1970. We have not made a retroactive adjustment of our estimates of enemy forces prior to December 1968 because we lack information on the timing and rate at which the forces in Cambodia were built up. In any event, the adjustment of our estimates was only 10,000 for combat forces.

2. During 1969 relatively low personnel inputs and comparatively high losses resulted in a decline in the enemy's combat forces and their strength at the end of 1969 is estimated at 130,000 to 150,000 men. This is some 40,000 less than our estimate of 170,000 to 190,000 for the end of 1968. However, only 30,000 of this decline in force levels represents actual losses; the remaining 10,000 reflects the northward deployment of NVA forces out of the threat area between the DMZ and Dong Hoi, North Vietnam.

3. The strength of VC/NVA combat forces has unquestionably continued to decline during 1970. However, it is not yet possible to determine the extent of this erosion. For such an assessment of combat force trends we require a large amount of detailed order of battle information.

however, points clearly to a continued erosion of unit strengths. In addition, there have occurred a number of reorganizations including the disbanding of regimental and battalion commands, which reflect severe localized manpower problems as well as the change in enemy strategy.

4. From experience we know that a loss/gain methodology cannot be used to compute changes in enemy strength. However, the wide gap between inputs from recruiting and infiltration, and losses strongly supports the view that VC/NVA combat forces have continued to decline during 1970.

5. During 1969, when the MACV estimate of VC/NVA losses from all causes was about 290,000 and our estimate of infiltration was about 100,000-120,000, we estimated with reasonable confidence that the VC/NVA combat forces were eroded by about 30,000. (The 30,000 erosion estimated for 1969 is based on two mutually supporting methodologies that are independent of judgments concerning overall manpower losses and gains.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

During 1970, VC/NVA losses will be on the order of 200,000 (assuming that the level of combat for the year remains at the average level indicated thus far) and infiltration arrivals will total about 60,000.

6. If the same relationship holds this year as last year, the VC/NVA combat forces might decline by the end of 1970 by some 20,000-25,000 men. This would place these forces at about 110,000-125,000 by the end of December 1970, before the 1970/1971 dry season infiltration flow begins to arrive. To be valid, this kind of calculation requires a number of crucial assumptions: 1.) that the relationship between the losses estimates and actual losses is constant for the two time periods; 2.) that the mix of losses among the enemy force echelons (combat forces, Administrative Services, Guerrillas, VCI, and laborers) is relatively constant over the period; and 3.) that our estimate of a constant level of recruiting in South Vietnam - 36,000 in each year - is correct. In addition, such an estimate relies on the accuracy of the infiltration estimates, but we have a high degree of confidence in them.

7. Administrative Services: A number of factors complicate any measurement of the trends in the strength of the VC/NVA Administrative Services. These factors include the following:

(a) Allied field efforts have been focused largely on the collection of information on regular combat forces because of the greater military threat they represent; and

(b) The US Intelligence Community did not concern itself with the size of the enemy's Administrative Services until early 1967. As a result, changes in estimates of the personnel in the Administrative Services from one period to another often reflect better collection and analysis of data rather than real increases or decreases in the number of units or personnel. Thus, there is no retroactive series which accurately depicts trends in the strength of Administrative Services. The softness of these estimates is reflected in the relatively broad ranges assigned to them.

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8. Guerrillas: Since the end of 1967 there has been both a qualitative and quantitative decline in the VC Guerrilla force in South Vietnam. The strength of the Guerrilla force in December 1967 is estimated at 100,000-125,000 men and reflects the heavy recruitment and upgrading begun in the last half of the year in preparation for the 1968 Tet Offensive. As a result of heavy losses suffered during the Tet, May and August offensives and the upgrading of Guerrillas to meet the increased manpower demands by the regular combat forces, the Guerrilla force experienced an overall quantitative and qualitative decline. Subsequent recruitment was not sufficient to offset the total attrition of Guerrilla units or to compensate for the loss of the experienced cadre who were upgraded to the regular combat forces. By the end of December 1968, Guerrilla strength had dropped to between 80,000 and 100,000 men. The Guerrilla force continued to be eroded in 1969 and by March 1970 had decreased to 60,000-80,000 men. This downward trend probably will continue throughout the remainder of 1970, although at a lesser rate because of the re-emphasis of guerrilla warfare.

B. Cambodia

9. CIA estimates of enemy forces in South Vietnam include VC and NVA combat and Administrative Service personnel located in Cambodia. At the time of Sihanouk's overthrow in March 1970, there were an estimated 50,000-60,000 VC/NVA forces operating astride the Cambodian-South Vietnamese border. In terms of headquarters subordination, the number of these forces actually located in Cambodia were estimated at the low end of a 40,000-50,000 range. This force level probably has not changed significantly since that time despite the casualties the enemy has suffered because of infiltration and the deployment of some 20 additional enemy battalions into Cambodia from their previous positions along the border. However, the actual number currently is believed to be at the high end of the 40,000-50,000 range. In addition to these VC and NVA forces, there are an estimated 10,000 Khmer Communists organized in regular and irregular combat units. This is some 2 to 3 times the number of armed Communist insurgents estimated for the pre-March 18th period. Thus, total Communist forces located in Cambodia and representing a potential threat to the viability of the Cambodian Government currently number on the order of 60,000 men. Table 2 presents a detailed

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breakdown of this 60,000 man force by function. Regular combat forces are estimated at about 25,000 men, Administrative Service personnel at about 30,000 and indigenous Guerrilla forces at about 5,000. Because of the difficulty of determining the roles of many of the VC/NVA units located in Cambodia we have continued to maintain a combined estimate of enemy forces in SVN and Cambodia. Enemy maneuver battalions in Cambodia fall logically into three categories. First, there are those that are actively employed against Cambodia either in a combat role or on proselytizing/population and resources control missions. Secondly, there are the combat forces performing a security function for the command and logistics organizations. Thirdly, as before, a number of combat units are located in Cambodia for tactical convenience that are nonetheless targeted against SVN. In August, DIA/CIA estimated that about 38 of the 84 battalions then located in Cambodia seemed to be actively employed against Cambodia in one role or another. The deployment of enemy forces has changed somewhat since then and there appear to be a few more units in this category at the present time.

C. Laos

10. To date, there are no systematized [redacted] 25X1 order of battle estimates for Laos. As a result, the Intelligence Community generally has accepted the Vientiane Station's [redacted] "Monthly OB Summary" as the basic order of battle document for Laos with some adjustments made to consider [redacted] intelligence. However, these [redacted] estimates, even with [redacted] adjustments, 25X1 remain point-in-time fixes and cannot be regarded as retroactive estimates or used to make meaningful comparisons of the trends in enemy force levels. These shortcomings in order of battle estimates for Laos reflect the fact that we lack sufficient ground coverage in a number of areas of Laos and [redacted] data available on Communist activity in Laos is very limited.

25X1 These gaps in intelligence preclude any reliable retroactive adjustment of the enemy's force structure and strength.

25X1 The Intelligence Community's first attempt to develop [redacted] 25X1 estimate of enemy strength was in October 1969. This estimate which was updated in May 1970, is the latest [redacted] estimate of the Washington Intelligence Community.

11. The strength of Communist forces in Laos in May 1970 is estimated at about 115,000 of which about

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[Redacted]

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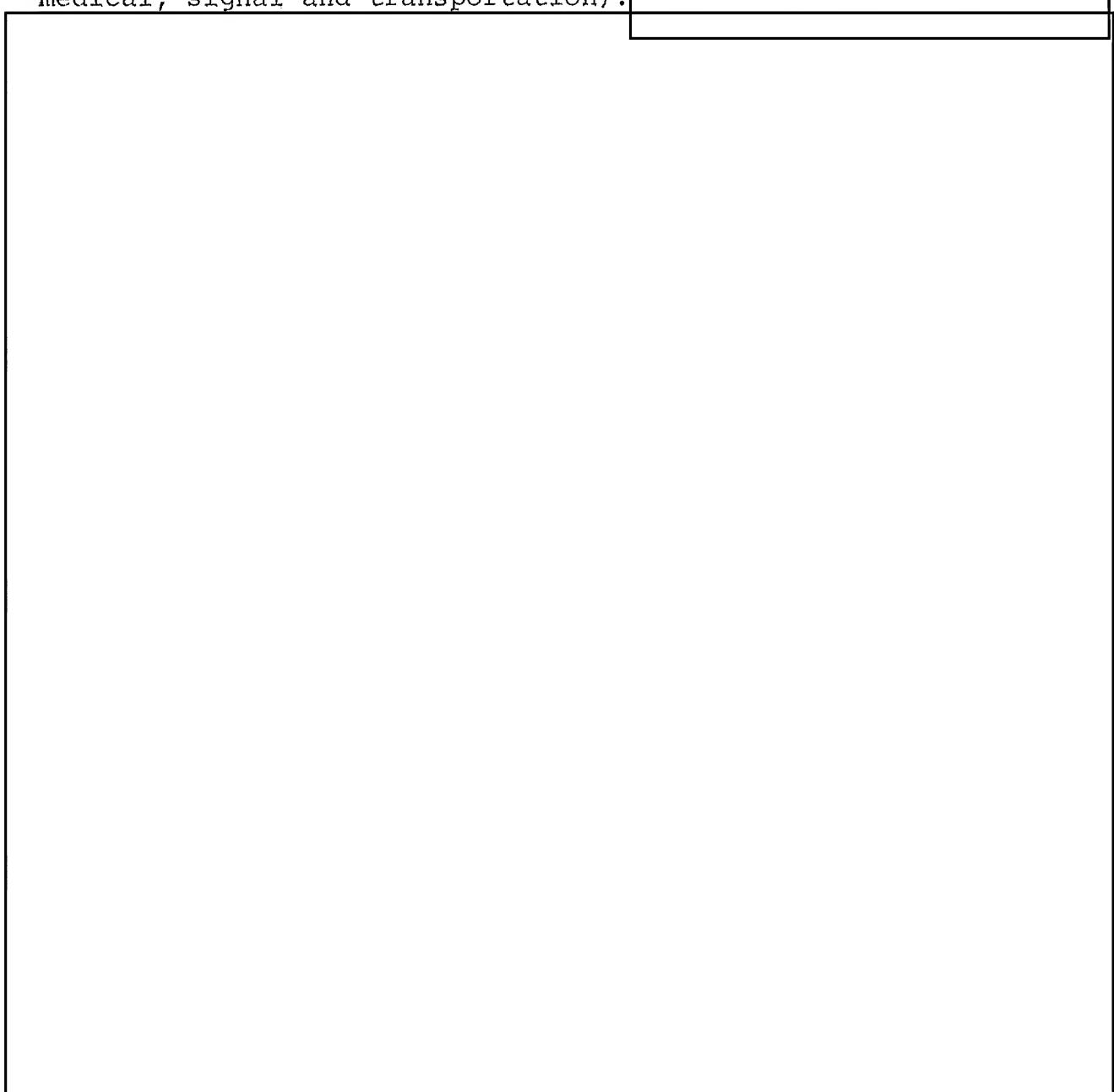
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67,000 were NVA and 48,000 were Pathet Lao (including PL and dissident neutralists). As shown in Table 3, about 59,000 troops -- 32,000 NVA and 27,000 PL -- are estimated to be combat forces, including about 8,000 men in anti-aircraft (AAA) units. The remaining 56,000 NVA and PL forces are command and support personnel (e.g., engineer, medical, signal and transportation).

[Redacted]

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Table I  
VC/NVA Forces In South Vietnam  
(In Thousands)

	31 Dec 67	31 Dec 68	30 Jun 69	31 Dec 69	31 Mar 70
Regular Combat Forces	<u>165-185</u>	<u>170-190</u>	<u>150-170</u>	<u>130-150</u>	<u>130-150</u>
NVA	<u>95-105</u>	<u>120-130</u>	<u>105-115</u>	<u>95-105</u>	<u>95-105</u>
VC	<u>70-80</u>	<u>50-60</u>	<u>45-55</u>	<u>35-45</u>	<u>35-45</u>
Administrative Services	<u>75-100</u>	<u>80-100</u>	<u>80-100</u>	<u>80-100</u>	<u>80-100</u>
NVA	<u>25-35</u>	<u>40-50</u>	<u>40-50</u>	<u>40-50</u>	<u>40-50</u>
VC	<u>50-65</u>	<u>40-50</u>	<u>40-50</u>	<u>40-50</u>	<u>40-50</u>
Guerrillas	<u>100-125</u>	<u>80-100</u>	<u>70-90</u>	<u>60-80</u>	<u>60-80</u>
TOTAL	<u>340-410</u>	<u>330-390</u>	<u>300-360</u>	<u>270-330</u>	<u>270-330</u>

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Table 2

Communist Forces in Cambodia  
(In Thousands)30 June 1970

Regular Combat Forces	<u>25</u>
NVA*	15
VC*	5
Khmer Communists	5
Administrative Services*	<u>30</u>
NVA	15
VC	15
Guerrillas (indigenous)	5
TOTAL	<u>60</u>

\*These forces are included in the estimate of VC/NVA forces in South Vietnam presented in Table 1.

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Table 3

Pathet Lao/NVA Forces in Laos  
(In Thousands)May 1970

Regular Combat Forces	<u>59</u>
NVA	32
PL (including Dissident Neutralists)	27
Command and Support Personnel	<u>56</u>
NVA	35
PL	21
<b>TOTAL</b>	<u><b>115</b></u>

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TABLE I

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Enemy Force Levels in SEAsia Countries

## Strength figures in 000's

## Retroactivity Center Adjusted Estimated Strengths

	31Dec67	30June68	31Dec68	30June69	31Dec69	30June70	Project 31Dec
<u>Cambodia*</u>							
Combat Forces							
NVA							5
Indigenous Communists							
VC							
Administrative Services							
NVA							
Indigenous Communists							
VC							
Guerrilla							5
<b>TOTAL</b>							
<u>Laos **</u>							
Combat Forces							
NVA					59	59	
Indigenous Communists					32	32	
Administrative Services					27	27	
NVA					56	56	
Indigenous Communists					35	35	
Guerrilla					21	21	
<b>TOTAL</b>					0	0	
<b>TOTAL</b>					115	115	
<u>SVN ***</u>							
Combat Forces	165-185	170-190	170-190	150-170	130-150	120-140	
NVA	95-105	120-130	120-130	105-115	95-105	90-100	
Indigenous Communists	70- 80	50- 60	50- 60	45- 55	35- 45	30- 40	
Administrative Services	75-100	60- 80	80-100	80-100	80-100	80-100	
NVA	25- 35	20- 30	40- 50	40- 50	40- 50	30- 50	
Indigenous Communists	50- 65	40- 50	40- 50	40- 50	40- 50	40- 50	
Guerrilla	100-125	80-125	80-100	70- 90	60- 80	60- 80	
<b>TOTAL</b>	340-410	310-395	330-390	300-360	270-330	260-330	

See Footnotes on Following Page.

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FOOTNOTES FOR TABLE 1.

\* Except for the indigenous Communists in Cambodia CIA estimates of VC/NVA forces in Cambodia are included in the estimates for South Vietnam. CIA has no retroactive series for enemy forces in Cambodia. See Text.

\*\* These data are agreed Community estimates for October 1969 and May 1970, respectively. They are point in time estimates and should not be used to indicate trends. The category of Administrative Services is normally carried as Command and Support Personnel and does not entirely equate with Administrative Services forces in South Vietnam or Cambodia.

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\*\*\* The estimate for 31 Dec 67 and June 1968 are not retroactively adjusted to include OB information picked up in Cambodia this last summer.

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